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TEC – TOWARDS E-COACHING

Towards e-Coaching is an Erasmus+ project developed in international partnership between Bialystok University of Technology in Poland, Leipzig University in Germany, The Technical University of Crete in Greece and Tampere University of Applied Sciences in Finland. The goal of the project has been to develop a methodology for online coaching pedagogy in a university setting and a handbook and course material for both university teachers and students to help them move towards e-coaching. This short paper will focus on the pedagogic approach for e-coaching.

There are many different definitions of coaching, but one that has been influential behind our thinking of online coaching is Flaherty's definition (2010) focuses on the *products* of coaching: 1) Long-term excellent performance – the focus of coaching remains beyond short-term performance (say, on a single course, exam, or even completion of the degree). Thus, another of the main goals of coaching is to develop the students' ability to 2) self-correct their performance as individuals and as a team *independently* of the coach and 3) self-generate (learn) through practice in a way that continuously improves their performance. It is imperative in coaching to move beyond the idea of the students being somewhat passive recipients in teachers' teaching interventions and that all their activities should somehow be designed, initiated and stimulated by the teacher.

Four cornerstones of e-Coaching

Based on extensive literature available on teams and coaching them and the wide range of experience available in the project team, we selected four main themes that function as the cornerstones of our e-Coaching methodology: 1) trust, 2) dialogue, 3) ownership and 4) co-creation. These cornerstones form a systemic whole in that they support each other, and a coaching approach built on top of them. Without any of these cornerstones, the framework for online coaching remains partial. It is often easier for teachers and students to fall back into teacher-centred education, especially if they are experiencing pressures to minimize any extra workload or improve their performance in the short term.

Effective teams are built on trust

Trust is an essential building block of coaching, both in face-to-face situations and in online environments. It is necessary if the team is to benefit from all of its members' skills, intelligence and creativity and, thus, needed to enable the other cornerstones. Generally, teams can build on two kinds of trust: Trust that the others will perform in a way that they have said they would and, more importantly, vulnerability-based trust (Lencioni, 2002; Edmondson, 2019). The latter is more critical for teams, especially with teams that do not yet have a track record for working together effectively. Vulnerability-based trust is crucial for teams engaging in work that requires innovation and creativity.

Dialogue is the key to making sense of the situation together

Dialogue can be defined as a co-operative inquiry into experience and thinking (Isaacs, 1999). It is needed in a team to make sense of the shared situation and how it is seen and thought of differently by each team member. Besides these differences in ways of thinking and experiencing, it is also necessary to uncover similarities and common ground in experience and thinking. For example, in resolving conflict situations, dialogue can also begin by exploring together the shared experience of frustration and its root causes in the shared situation.

Dialogue is also great for building trust and even friendship between people with a wide range of cultural and social backgrounds and personalities. A key element in building trust with dialogue is the open sharing of vulnerabilities or things that make us vulnerable to others' actions: potential weaknesses, mistakes, uncertainties, hesitations, life goals and even dreams for the future. Sharing these in a respectful environment can create a very high level of trust between team members (Lencioni, 2002).

A sense of ownership creates engagement and motivation

Ownership here means that the students are the primary owners of their personal and collaborative learning processes and the work they are doing together. It implies a sense of responsibility over the results but also being mindful of the effect that one's actions and behaviour – including interactions with other people involved have on the collaborative work. Facilitating a sense of ownership increases the students' sense of autonomy, competence and belonging to the team, which all help to build and maintain their intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020) and initiative.

Co-creation changes the world and builds professional identities

Co-creation in e-Coaching means that the team engages in a creative process where they create something of value together. It can be a product, a service, a prototype for either, a solution to a complex problem, or an experiment they engage in together. Co-creation is the shared mode of working that provides the context for coaching. Co-creation creates opportunities for all the other cornerstones of e-Coaching: There is a clear need to build and maintain trust between people engaged in it, there is a clear need for dialogue to make sense of what is being created together and how, and building something together is one of the best ways to build a sense of ownership over the process and its end products but also over the whole team. Together, the cornerstones of coaching provide excellent grounds for building professional and expert identities.

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